

Planning Department

We have experienced an exceptional year, arguably, our most productive year in recent history. It includes a series of significant planning approvals, grant applications, code revisions and code enforcement issues. Highlights include:

Former GM Site

Staff processed and the City approved seven (7) applications for a Major Development project at the former GM brake testing site. This project includes the construction for the soon-to-be-dedicated 123 Canon Avenue mixed-use building – for two retail shops and an upstairs residential unit. The approvals also cover the redevelopment of the balance of the site for several more lofts and additional retail spaces along Manitou Avenue. The City has received park and open space dedication that includes a 10' wide Creekwalk trail easement (with construction already begun) and land for the Shoshone Spring park/plaza.

Bottling Plant

The Conditional Use approval, and then the revised Conditional Use approval, for the reopening of the Mineral Springs Bottling Plant at 1310 Manitou Avenue. The Planning Commission toured the facility in October and the Mineral Springs Foundation hosted a very successful grand opening / fund raising event there in early November. The owner has expressed interest in marketing the mineral spring's water locally and internationally.

329 Manitou Avenue

The approval of a Major Development for a mixed-use building along the Avenue in front of the new 26-unit Taos Village townhome project. The project broke ground in early October, within six weeks after final City Council approval, for a mix of retail, office and apartment uses. *Staff anticipates that these two projects may serve as a prototype for other proposals.*

Red Mountain Phase 2

The City used a successful \$130,000 GOCO grant, and a successful extension of the GOCO grant, to help acquire, through a lease purchase arrangement, the 21+ acre site at the top of Pawnee Avenue. The site is adjacent to the City's 75-acre Red Mountain purchase. The City Administrator, the Finance Director, and former Mayor Bill Koerner, working together with the Open Space Advisory Committee and Planning Staff, collaborated to expedite this significant open space acquisition.

Eastern Gateway Arch

The Planning Staff applied for and received a new \$98,000 TEA-21 Enhancement grant, as well as a State Historic Fund grant, for the repair and reconstruction of the Eastern Arch. Following City Council approval of a revised archway reconstruction budget, the City awarded the bid to Holladay Brothers. By mid-October, the Arch was reconstructed and elevated with greenstone-faced concrete planters. The upgraded Historic Manitou Springs sign and new archway lighting (together with the new holiday decorations) make for a wonderful and attractive entryway statement for the community.

Creekwalk Trail

The City reapplied for and was awarded \$121,000 TEA-21 Enhancement grant funding for FY 2004 for the Phase 1 project designed to address the trail connection between Schryver Park (behind the swimming pool) and the Fields Community Park (skate park, tennis courts and playground). The Phase 2 trail project was one of several federal grant applications that have not yet received funding. Staff submitted over half (8 of the 15) TEA-21 applications and we received over 25% of the allocated TEA-21 funds within the region.

Downtown Streetscape

The Planning Department, together with Nolte, our engineering consultant, submitted a successful TEA-21 Enhancement grant for the Phase 1 Shoshone Spring Demonstration Project. After a thorough PPACG and CDOT Region 2 review process, the City was awarded a \$275,970 grant for the project. We were also notified that pending the availability of enhancement funds for FY 2005, CDOT is planning to fund \$300,000 in FY 2005 enhancement funds for Phase 2 of the Manitou Avenue project – namely streetscape improvements along the Avenue between Pawnee Avenue and the Town Clock. Planning Staff also succeeded in having another \$500,000 in federal funding earmarked for the Avenue project in FY 2007. (In mid-December, the City Administrator working with PPACG, succeeded in expediting \$95,000 of that designated federal funding.)

Other Redevelopment Proposals along Manitou Avenue

This fall, Staff has had several meetings with property owners on or near the Avenue about anticipated development proposals. These proposals include a townhouse project site along El Paso Boulevard, the redevelopment of a lodge property near the Fields Park, the redevelopment of a miniature golf site, the mixed-use development of a vacant site along Manitou Avenue, the redevelopment of two underutilized sites near the Avenue and the prospective development of another 15-20 dwelling units within a block of Manitou Avenue. The Planning Department currently has 18 dwelling units under review. If this pace continues, we could anticipate applications for new dwelling units, especially new townhomes or loft-type units near the Avenue, at roughly twice our “normal” pace.

CDOT Corridor Improvements Study (US Highway 24-West)

This spring Planning Staff met with CDOT officials and numerous engineering consultants about the preliminary design for corridor improvements along US Highway 24-West from I-25 to Manitou Springs. We expressed our comments and concerns about a wide range of issues including noise abatement, highway widening/blasting, drainage, intersection safety improvements (Washington Avenue signalization) as well as the prospect of transportation systems and demand management alternatives.

Building Permit Applications

Through mid-December, we have handled over 260 building permit applications and have collected roughly \$35,000 in use taxes. This is the second highest number of building permit applications in recent memory and, in all probability, city history.

Code Enforcement

Through mid-December, the Code Enforcement Officer has handled over 750 code enforcement and compliance issues. This is almost certainly a record number. These issues run the gamut from trash, vegetation and snow removal to building/sign permits and business license inspections. Our Code Enforcement Officer also handles a myriad of other matters including court bailiff, watering restrictions, footer/final inspections and photo documentation.

Planning Fees

After compiling background information and preparing a chart comparing the fees charged in other jurisdictions, the Planning Staff presented the City Administrator and City Council with a comprehensive list of proposed development review fee revisions. These fees had not been adjusted in a decade during which time inflation had reduced the effect of the fees by roughly 25%. In addition, the City needed a mechanism to allow it to pass-through our out-of-pocket expenses for professional and technical services furnished to the City. These proposed fees were adopted by the Council in early August and were implemented by mid-August.

Code Revisions

Planning Staff has prepared a series of code revisions – several to the Subdivision Regulations – which are designed to simplify the planning review process. These proposed revisions follow on the heels of numerous other code revisions, including a series of streamlining, subdivision, and historic preservation code revisions.

Drainage Criteria Manual, Volume 2

At staff's recommendation, City Council adopted by reference, the City of Colorado Springs' Drainage Criteria Manual, Volume 2. As the City has professional or consulting resources available, the manual will need to be refined to reflect the differences present between the two communities along with any refinements in our Best Management Practices.

Red Rock Canyon/Crystal Hills East

The City Council approved a Major Development, Rezoning, Preliminary Plat and Annexation for an 18-lot subdivision located between Crystal Hills and Red Rock Canyon. Meanwhile, the City of Colorado Springs announced, together with the Trust for Public Lands, plans to acquire the Red Rock Canyon property. The Open Space Advisory Committee has worked extensively with the Red Rock Canyon Committee to review numerous trail options on this 800-acre open space site.

Special Election

Planning Staff assisted the City Clerk (late 2002) in preparing mail-in ballots for the special election pertaining to the possible revision of the Historic Preservation Ordinance. In January 2003, the electorate voted to retain the current preservation ordinance by *not* revising the existing "opt-out" provisions.

Historic Preservation Tour

This fall, the City hosted a preservation tour associated with the National Trust for Historic Preservation Conference held in Denver. A group toured town with Michelle Anthony and Mark Wolfe, Director of the State Historical Fund, serving as co-hosts. Michelle also prepared a 40-page pamphlet / tour guide. The guide is available in our Carnegie Library and was described by one conferee as a “keeper.”

Intergovernmental Agreements (IGA)

City Council approved two IGAs this spring associated with our continued use of geographic and parcel attribute information services between the City and both Colorado Springs and El Paso County. This fall, the City Administrator authorized a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Colorado Springs which would allow the City to begin using upgraded aerial photographic information. Staff has used the aerial photos to help Public Services find the edge of right-of-ways.

Spa Building

In April and in September, Planning Staff prepared memos to the City Council reviewing a wide variety of issues pertaining to the vacant Spa Building. The resolution of the Spa Building is one of the City’s top 10 goals for the new year. Staff, together with the City Administrator, has met with prospective developers and with the Regional Floodplain Engineer to review the issues likely to be generated by any redevelopment proposal. Staff has also helped assemble packets of pertinent information for prospective developers.

Streetcar Shuttle Program

This holiday season the City concluded our three-year, \$950,000 demonstration program for streetcar shuttle service. When the service first began in the spring of 2001, the shuttle service included the Historic Downtown, the Garden of the Gods Trading Post, the COG Railway and Red Rocks Shopping Center. Over the past two years the streetcar service has gradually been extended east until it included Old Colorado City. Over the past 3 years, Springs Transit has identified over 170,000 streetcar riders – a majority were visitors.

Parking

Earlier in the year, Staff fulfilled a request from the Planning Commission to analyze the parking requirements in Manitou Springs versus the comparable requirements in other front range and mountain communities. A couple of years ago, Staff, working with a funded internship, provided the Metro District with alternative layouts for parking areas.

Administrative Assistant Position

We have filled the Administrative Assistant position twice this year. Cheri Mills is now on board and on schedule in her orientation, training and general helpfulness. She comes to the City with previous municipal experience in Arizona and with an active sense of humor, both of which are serving her well. Her customer service skills are notable.

Boards and Commissions

The Planning Department also provides on-going staff support for three (3) Boards and Commissions. These include the Planning Commission, the Historic Preservation Commission and the Open Space Advisory Committee. In our efforts to streamline and help simplify our development review process, staff has prepared handouts, checklists and submittal schedules designed to help applicants understand the codes and review processes involved. Staff continues to consult with prospective applicants in pre-submittal meetings for the same purpose.

Liaison

The Planning Department has also served as a liaison to various agencies and committees in the state or the region, including the Colorado Historical Society, GOCO, CSU (FIMS), Springs Transit, PPACG and other Planning Departments.

Todd Liming
Planning Director